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Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-first session
13-24 March 2017
Agenda item 3 (a) (i)
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

Ministerial round table: Gender pay gaps in the public and private sectors: how can equal pay for work of equal value be achieved in the changing world of work?

Chair's summary

1. On 13 March 2017, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Gender pay gaps in the public and private sectors: how can equal pay for work of equal value be achieved in the changing world of work?", under the priority theme "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work". The participants exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices on the subject, with an emphasis on national laws, policies, programmes and regulations to reduce the gender pay gap, as well as gender-based discrimination in the labour market and occupational segregation. Participants also highlighted effective measures to promote a better work-life balance.

2. Ms. Elke Ferner, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of the German Government, chaired the round table and made an opening statement before the beginning of the dialogue. Ministers and high-level officials from 25 Member States made interventions at the round table, and the dialogue concluded with remarks by the Chair. Yannick Glemarec, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), made closing comments.

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Effective national laws, policies, programmes and regulations that have helped to reduce gender pay gaps

3. Participants described a wide range of national laws, policies, programmes and regulations that have enabled their countries to narrow the gender pay gap. The need for structural and holistic approaches to tackle the root causes of gender differentiation in pay was emphasized as a lesson learned by several participants. Many participants also stressed the link between efforts to close the gender pay gap with those to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development more broadly, citing interlinkages between women's economic empowerment and economic growth. Institutional arrangements such as governmental audits and the establishment of committees empowered to deal with wage discrepancies were described as useful tools to narrow the gender pay gap. Several participants also underscored the importance of partnerships between Governments and non-governmental actors.

4. Participants highlighted that Governments should not limit their work to legislative measures: raising awareness about the gender pay gap, confronting gender-based stereotypes that influence labour market choices and outcomes, and providing both public and private sector employers and other relevant actors, such as trade unions, with incentives and instruments to measure and monitor pay gaps were described as three key steps towards ensuring equal pay for work of equal value. Participants highlighted that structural macroeconomic policies have a stronger impact on gender equality when they take into consideration the gender-segregated nature of the labour market and specifically target domestic and care workers, pregnant women and single-headed households. Several participants emphasized the importance of strong parental leave policies that provide women with employment security, as well as larger pensions, which benefit societies more broadly. The meaningful integration of the role of fathers in order to change the stereotypes held by employers, which could lead to gender-neutral hiring processes, was also part of the discussion.

Measures to ensure that women are paid the same as men for work of equal value in the private sector

5. Several participants noted that the gender pay gap tends to be wider in the private sector than in the public sector. Ministers shared best practices on intersectoral, sectoral and company-level measures to bridge the gender pay gap in the private sector, including: setting specific gender equality objectives, such as equal opportunities programmes; or setting targets for women's representation on boards of directors, including through the use of special measures. Several ministers pointed out that, to the extent possible, the public sector should support the efforts of businesses to close the pay gap, while underscoring the importance of sanctions for private companies that discriminate in hiring between women and men.

6. Transparency in pay structure by level and sex, between employers and their employees and across sectors, was identified by several participants as an important tool in closing the gender pay gap because it can be an effective incentive for companies to take positive action. Measures to address the gap include: providing childcare facilities; establishing a legal obligation for companies to publish a gender equality plan; and offering government training and other services to micro- and

small enterprises on how to narrow the pay gap. Several ministers indicated that the existence of a minimum wage tends to affect women more than men, and that establishing a minimum wage or raising it can contribute towards narrowing gender pay gaps.

Measures to eliminate gender-based labour market discrimination and occupational segregation and to promote better work-life balance

7. Several participants noted that the gender pay gap is linked to gender-based discrimination and occupational segregation, both of which are rooted in gender-based stereotypes that influence women's and men's education and employment choices. Legislative interventions accompanied by advocacy efforts to encourage boys and girls to make non-traditional choices in education can boost women's participation in new scientific and technological fields and in other sectors of the labour market that tend to be more highly remunerated and dominated by men, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics, the armed forces or the diplomatic corps. National programmes to encourage men and boys to pursue education and employment in areas more traditionally dominated by women, such as health care, were also cited as ways to eliminate gender-based labour market segregation.

8. Participants underscored the need to promote a better work-life balance, particularly for women, who tend to spend more time carrying out unpaid care work. They identified promoting options and the right to more flexible working arrangements, including home-based work, as key components for supporting a good work-life balance. The recognition of the gender gap inherent in the responsibility of unpaid care work, and the implementation of measures to bridge it, was described as an important contribution towards the elimination of gender-based discrimination in the labour market and to the instilling of a culture of equality of treatment in decision-making and the promotion of a work-life balance for all.

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Ministerial round table: technology changing the world of work: how can technology and innovation be harnessed to accelerate women's economic empowerment?

Chair's summary

1. On 13 March 2017, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Technology changing the world of work: how can technology and innovation be harnessed to accelerate women's economic empowerment?", under the priority theme "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work". The participants in the round table exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic with an emphasis on the link between technology, innovation and women's economic empowerment.

2. The Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Valentin Rybakov, chaired the round table and made an opening statement. Ministers and high-level officials from 16 Member States participated in the round table. The Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Yannick Glemarec, made closing comments and the Chair made a closing statement.

3. Participants emphasized the critical role technology and innovation can play in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Participants described legislation, action plans, programmes and other initiatives aimed at promoting

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education and economic opportunities for women in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) sectors. Several good practices were identified which may be replicated by other governments.

Promotion of science, technology, engineering and mathematics education to develop skills for women at all levels

4. Participants discussed the importance of ensuring universal digital literacy to equip women and men to participate in and benefit from technology and innovation sectors. The achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, on ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning, requires eliminating gender disparities in STEM education and redressing the low participation of women and girls in technology and innovation fields.

5. Participants also noted that women are vastly underrepresented in STEM education, but noted initiatives introduced in some countries. Those include the provision of training on STEM for women and girls, the funding of school programmes and the provision of scholarships and internships to boost women's enrolment in STEM subjects. Other countries have introduced grassroots information and communication technology (ICT) curriculum programmes as well as innovative awards to promote technology among young women and girls and boost STEM training for students from vulnerable backgrounds.

6. Participants also acknowledged and highlighted the role of partnerships in promoting STEM education for women and girls.

Acceleration of job creation for women through technology and innovation

7. Participants discussed the importance of harnessing technology and innovation to improve the economic empowerment of women through the leveraging of digital financial services. Participants noted the progress made in several countries in promoting women's access to financial resources through digital financial services and in connecting rural women to markets using mobile device-based services.

8. Reformed regulatory guidelines that offer online business registration services to women have been successful. Participants noted that digital solutions have simplified the process of starting and registering a business venture for women entrepreneurs.

9. In some countries, online compendiums of skills enable women to go online and research employment opportunities in socioprofessional categories.

Gender stereotypes

10. Participants emphasized the sociocultural barriers women and girls encounter when choosing a career in ICT and STEM. The lack of representation of women in ICT and STEM sectors was one such challenge. Participants observed that women and girl students pursuing STEM subjects lack successful women professional role models. Women role models in ICT and STEM sectors can encourage students to pursue an advanced education in ICT and develop their own career paths in those sectors. To dismantle that barrier, some countries offer field tours and lectures by researchers and technology experts to expose students to women leaders in technology and innovation.

11. Participants further noted that conservative cultures need to promote a favourable learning environment for STEM subjects that will encourage girls in school. To boost the enabling environment for girls, bilateral cooperation at the regional level on teacher training in technology sectors is vital to the promotion of ICT.

12. Participants also noted that, given the existence of stereotypes, promoting women in science and technology leadership is a priority. Various projects aimed at promoting women leadership in science were cited as examples.

13. Participants acknowledged that technology can also be leveraged to tackle stereotypes. Many countries use social media and "hackathons" to promote positive messages related to gender equality and women's empowerment and to disseminate information aimed at addressing violence against women.

Flexible work arrangements

14. Participants discussed the potential of technology to help retain the talents of women in the workplace by offering them flexible work options such as work from home policies, part-time work arrangements and remote work options. Those modalities allow women the freedom to also fulfil their care responsibilities at home.

15. Participants noted that flexible work arrangements are important to encourage balance between work and family life. They shared the progress being made in addressing the imbalance, which includes legal reforms on flexibility in workplaces that target both the public and private sectors.

Internet security and cyberbullying

16. While participants shared a commitment to ensuring that technology and innovation are embedded in government policies and programmes, some participants highlighted that special attention needs to be given to prevent technology-related violence against women. Participants noted that combating cyberbullying contributes to creating a safe and secure environment for women and girls in every sphere of life. In that regard, participants noted the efforts of some countries to address technological abuse in online space in order to establish a functional online mechanism to protect and empower women.

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Ministerial round table: informal and non-standard work: what policies can effectively support women's economic empowerment?

Chair's summary

1. On 13 March 2017, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Informal and non-standard work: what policies can effectively support women's economic empowerment?", under the priority theme "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work". The participants in the round table exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic with an emphasis on policies and programmes to ensure the economic viability of informal and non-standard work and to extend social protection and labour rights to women working in the informal economy.

2. The Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Motome Takisawa, served as Chair of the round table, and made an introductory statement. Ministers and high-level officials from 19 Member States participated in the round table. The dialogue concluded with closing remarks from the Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Lakshmi Puri, and the Chair.

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Challenges posed by informal and non-standard work

3. Participants noted that women informal and non-standard workers are major contributors to national economies. However, they also recognized that women who are engaged in informal and non-standard employment are subject to a lack of social protection and labour rights, and face the occupational segregation, gender wage gaps, unequal access to resources and disproportionate shares of unpaid care and domestic work that apply to all women workers.

4. Participants highlighted a number of challenges confronting women engaged in informal and non-standard work. The non-contractual nature of most paid domestic work in the informal economy was identified as particularly problematic, denying domestic workers the social and labour protections afforded to formal workers. Several participants identified violence and harassment in unregulated workplaces as an overriding concern for women in the informal economy. Participants noted that rural women are particularly marginalized as workers in the informal economy. The situation of migrant women workers, who tend to be concentrated in low-paid and precarious informal work, was identified as a significant challenge, as poor working conditions in the informal economy are exacerbated by labour discrimination, sexism, racism and xenophobia. Many participants discussed the overwhelming burden of unpaid domestic and care work on women informal workers, which limits their chances for economic independence and empowerment.

Policy responses to support the economic empowerment of women engaged in informal and non-standard work

5. Participants provided examples of a range of multifaceted approaches that governments are taking to address the challenges resulting from increasing informal and non-standard forms of work and to create favourable environments for all women workers. Participants reinforced the need to increase efforts to promote the transition to formal employment, in that formalization provides women workers with social protection and labour right guarantees. Ministers also mentioned efforts to strengthen the legal and policy environment as a way to ensure legal protections for women in the informal economy. Several participants noted the recent ratification of the International Labour Organization Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), as an impetus for passing measures to ensure decent working conditions, maximum working hours and minimum wages, and benefits such as vacation leave, sick leave and health care for domestic workers.

6. Participants discussed the importance of government prioritization of social protection and care infrastructure for the promotion of women's economic empowerment in the context of informal and non-standard work. Maternity and parental leave, basic income security for children and public works programmes were noted as policy responses that have been applied in different countries. Speakers pointed to the specific importance of paid paternity leave, supported by workplace policies that reward male workers who are actively involved in childcare. Ministers noted the importance of accessible and quality childcare and care facilities for children and other dependents to reduce women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work. Many speakers recognized the importance of investing in care infrastructure, such as early childhood education and health care,

to address the "motherhood pay penalty". Good practice examples were also provided of national care systems, government funding for preschool, childcare subsidies, funding for workplace crèches and tax allowances for employers who employ women with young children.

7. Participants emphasized the need for measures to make informal and non-standard work more economically viable by tackling gender gaps and advancing women's economic empowerment. Participants discussed establishing minimum wages as a key tool to reduce gender pay gaps and ensure an adequate standard of living for women informal workers. Several countries gave examples of recent labour market interventions to increase the economic viability of informal work, such as laws guaranteeing mandatory minimum wages.

8. Participants provided several examples of national education and technical and vocational skills training initiatives as a means of addressing the barriers women face in the transition into the formal economy. The programmes include those that aim to increase the participation of rural and indigenous women in the labour force and to encourage women to return to work after maternity leave. Many participants also discussed national social protection policies for women workers, both formal and informal, including policies designed to ensure workplace safety, address sexual harassment in the workplace, ensure minimum and maximum working hours per week and provide paid annual leave.

9. Participants identified entrepreneurship as a vehicle for women's economic empowerment in the informal economy, which can lead to improved incomes and contribute to poverty reduction at the household and community levels. They discussed measures to support women's access to finance and banking, and markets and supply chains. Particular emphasis was placed on enabling women in small and medium-sized enterprises to access credit and microcredit. Several participants gave examples of policies designed to increase access to finance for women entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized business operators, including enabling government regulations, subsidies and tax incentives, as well as targeted assistance through development funding, credit cooperatives and community banks. Some participants noted the renewed focus on ensuring credit facilities for women in special circumstances, including women who have been subject to violence and trafficking and returning migrant workers.